

REED - TAN - FRIEZE

Drawer 10

100-1000

71.2009.085.03873



# Abraham Lincoln's Contemporaries

James Frazier Reed

Excerpts from newspapers and other  
sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

# GIVES DETAILS OF REED-DONNER TRIP

MAJOR E. A. SHERMAN DESCRIBES WORK OF FORMER RESIDENT OF SPRINGFIELD.

Man Who Was Companion of Abraham Lincoln Before Civil War, Noted for His Deeds of Valor.

BY MAJOR EDWIN A. SHERMAN

(Pioneer of 1849 and President of Associated Veterans of the Mexican War.)

During the Black Hawk Indian war of 1832 Abraham Lincoln was commissioned a captain of Illinois volunteers, and with his company, after rendering good service and that campaign supposed to have been closed, was mustered out. Hostilities again having broken out and volunteers again called Lincoln volunteered again, and as a private No. 4 of Captain Early's company of mounted volunteers, which was mustered into the United States service by Capt. Robert Anderson (of Ft. Sumter fame in after years) on the twentieth of June, 1832, and Black Hawk being captured, ended that war, and Captain Early's company was mustered out of service at White Water river, a branch of Fox river, in Wisconsin, July 10, 1832, following.

Abraham Lincoln was the company clerk who made out the muster rolls for the same mustering army officer, and of which he made several copies, which were signed by Robert Anderson, United States army, mustering officer, and of them I have made copies, which I still retain.

Lincoln was the fourth private on the roll, and next to him, his comrade and chum, No. 5, was James Frazier Reed, and it is of the latter especially and his career in brief as a California pioneer and the first duly authenticated Master Mason and Royal Arch Mason to cross the plains, the Rockies and the Sierra Nevada; that I write this biographic and historic sketch.

## Comes to Springfield.

His ancestors on the paternal side were of noble, patriotic Polish blood, who fled from Russian tyranny at the time of the dismemberment of Poland by Russia, Prussia and Austria, and whose name was then Reednoski, but he retained only the first part of the name, Reed, after finding refuge in Scotland, and marrying into the Clan Frazier of that country. His parents removing to Armagh, Ireland, he was born on entering that bay, and when about two years of age his father died. His widowed mother soon after embarked for America to join her brother, who had settled in Virginia, and where young Reed grew up to sturdy manhood, and from thence emigrated to Springfield, Ill., where he made the friendly acquaintance of Abraham Lincoln and other prominent public

men of that section. He was a very enterprising, public-spirited man and foremost in general improvements. He constructed a flour mill and furniture factory at the bend and falls of the Sangamon river, which is now the power of a large portion of Illinois.

He was United States pension agent at Springfield in 1845.

He married a Mrs. Backinstos, a widow with one little daughter, Virginia, and a lady, a true woman and wife worthy of his affection and devotion, faithful until death. In 1843 and 1844 the news received from Oregon and California attracted his attention and he decided to emigrate with his family to California, but it was not until early in the spring of 1846 that he was able to settle up his business matters and prepare for the long journey overland to the Pacific coast. Several others, with their families, desired to join him, as there was a large number in Missouri, with ex-Governor Lilburn W. Boggs of that state, forming companies to start with the same object.

## Reed-Donner Trip Planned.

One of Reed's neighbors of considerable property desired to join him with his family, and with these two families and others formed what was called "the Reed-Donner party," and this was before the breaking out of the Mexican war. Governor Boggs fortified himself with a passport and letter of protection from the United States secretary of state, a copy of which I have, and Mr. Reed received the following letter, duly signed and sealed by Governor Thomas Ford and all the other state officers, and Col. Edward D. Baker, then congressman from the state of Illinois, besides other prominent citizens:

"Executive Department, State of Illinois, Springfield, April 16, 1846.—Our worthy and highly esteemed friend and fellow-citizen, James F. Reed, Esq., being about to remove to a distant and foreign land, we, feeling a deep and lively interest in his future prospects in life, do most cheerfully testify to his uniform, correct and gentlemanly deportment as a citizen and to his very efficient and businesslike habits as a man; and that wherever he may cast his lot we are prepared, from a long and intimate acquaintance with him, to recommend him to the confidence and respect of all with whom he may desire or be called upon to associate. He carries with him our very best wishes for the future security, contentment, happiness and abundant prosperity of himself and family."

"Thomas Ford, Governor,"

(and other signers).

"Springfield (Ill.), April 16, 1846."

## Expedition Leaves for West.

Thus prepared, the Reed-Donner party started from Springfield on their long journey. Reed's wagons were loaded with full outfits of clothing, provisions, utensils and something of a library. Donner's wagons, besides like equipment, had plows and farming implements as well and stores of goods almost like an army sutler's supplies. They were overloaded at the start, causing wearisome delays and the most of which were finally abandoned, and finally disaster of one kind and another landed them in "Starvation Camp" at Truckee lake, now called Donner lake for those of the Donner family who perished there, concerning which I refer your readers to McGlashan's book, which is generally correct, though there are some errors, but chiefly of omission.

## Killed in Self-Defense.

The unfortunate affair in the death of Snyder by Reed in self-defense and of his wife against the assaults of a temporarily insane teamster caused Reed to be driven from camp in the midst of winter, defenseless from human and other wolves, who would have perished but for his loving daughter, Virginia, who followed him, giving him his arms for protection and food for his sustenance, and so compelled to flee for his life from jealous and ungovernable madmen—malcontents who had been compelled to leave other trains while en route and forced themselves of necessity on Reed's, some of whom he was destined to rescue after they had become cannibals by eating the flesh of their starved companions.

He crossed the deep snows of the Sierra Nevada and reached Sutter's Fort in a terribly emaciated condition. There he obtained a saddle horse from Captain Sutter, but the country was in war, and to reach Yerba Buena (or San Francisco) to obtain relief for the sufferers he had to proceed by way of San Jose, where he was stopped and forced to join Captain Weber's company of mounted volunteers and serve in the capacity of first lieutenant to fight the Spanish Californians under Sanchez on the Santa Clara plains.

The following is a copy of his report of that battle, written on poor paper, with the horn of his saddle for a desk and written in the rain. It would do credit to a West Point graduate:

## Copy of Reed's Letter.

(Copy.)

"Pueblo De San Jose, 12th January, 1847—Capt. John A. Sutter—Dear Sir: By this time you have heard of the battle of Santa Clara, which came off on the 2d inst. between the United States forces and the Californians. Report reached this place about Christmas that the insurgents to the number of 300 or 400 had collected in the redwoods, some twenty-five miles distant. On receipt of this information Lieut. W. Pinckney, who commands here, dispatched a courier to Monterey to inform Captain Maddox and requested him to come up the coast way of Santa Cruz to the pass, there to remain and if possible to intercept the enemy if they should retreat that way, while Captain Weber would go to Sanchez' ranch, within twenty-five miles of Yerba Buena, where he expected mounted volunteers to be sent from the latter place by order of Captain Mervine, who also was made acquainted with Pinckney with the position of the enemy.

## As First Lieutenant.

"We started (Weber's company), I having the command as first lieutenant; proceeded to Sanchez'; from there to the Mission Dolores; from that place Weber went to Yerba Buena, and after waiting two or three days was reinforced by thirty-two marines, eight artillerists commanded by Captain Marsten, and, I think, seventeen mounted volunteers of Captains Smith's and Martin's companies. Both gentlemen were present, and we had about twenty-eight men, making in all eighty-five men, with one piece of artillery. There was a request made to Captain Marsten that I should return with the marines and artillery, but I think by an order which Marsten received he was to proceed to the Pueblo. However, we, the mounted men, or nearly all of us, cut loose from the marines and took to the mountains to find the Californians, and at the northwest corner of the redwoods came on their evacuated encampment.

"We took trail, pursued them toward the Santa Clara Mission. In the evening we came up again with the marines, encamped at a place called the 'Sheep Farm,' ten miles from this place. We, however, left the trail but a short distance from the camp, and on our way toward the mission fall in with it again, when Captains Weber, Smith and Martin took in detached parties about twenty-one men, to find the location of the enemy, while the rest of the forces moved onward.

#### Performs Service as Scout.

"We had not traveled over four miles when our advanced guard reported that the advance of the enemy was in sight. On receipt of this Captain Marsten directed me to take as many men as I thought prudent to reconnoiter, which I did, and found the Californians lodged in a point of timber on the right and somewhat in front, with their scouts a little distance on a small plain, galloping, whooping and daring us for cowards to come on. When I had reconnoitered and found the position of the foe I halted the men and rode back to Captain Marsten to inform him, and I requested him to let me advance with the mounted troops to take possession of the woods on the right and bring on the engagement in our own mode of fighting, which he refused, stating at the same time he would have to wait the arrival of the scouts, Weber, Smith and Martin. In a short time they came in, when Weber's company advanced by order. Then commenced the play. We soon routed them (the enemy) from the woods, when we were on foot, firing from trees. Afterward we mounted and took position in two divisions, one on the right and the other on the left of the artillery and marines. Captains Smith's and Martin's companies were as rear guards. By this time the firing was general, and as we advanced the enemy gave way, but charging at times in beautiful style (they are, indeed, fine-looking horsemen), retreating and charging alternately until we came to a muddy piece of ground on the bank of a little branch, where it was nearly knee deep. There our horses could with difficulty get along, owing to the poor state in which they were from past service.

#### Tried to Surround Americans.

"At this place the Californians made a desperate effort to make a complete surround. Finding us all huddled together in the mud, they all commenced firing, particularly on the right. When I commanded the second division of Captain Weber's company, nearly three-fourths of the enemy were popping away in fine style, and I do assure you we returned compliments without much delay. Here one of the marines was slightly wounded on the head. Every now and then the cannon would discharge at them. Finally we drove them from the field. Their numbers (without a caballada, horses for remounts) were 100. Out of eighty-five we had to place over twenty as guard on our loose horses.

"At night the Californians sent in a flag of truce, suing for terms with us, which were sent to Yerba Buena, and before the answer returned, Captain Maddox came from the Pass, where he had waited two or three days. It was in the evening when he came upon the enemy's camp before they were aware, and would have dashed into them in an instant had they not been expert in raising the white flag. He told me he

never saw such an uproar as his appearance made. Finally he came to our quarters at the mission, about two miles from the enemy, when the courier arrived from Yerba Buena. The conditions were submitted to them, and after some time to deliberate they came to terms and laid down their arms on the 7th instant, and were permitted to disperse.

"At first, the enemy would not admit that any were killed, but since the treaty they admit three killed and five wounded; and today there has been found one of their people on the plains nearly eaten by the wolves.

#### Trials During Insurgent War.

"I think that there were more killed. Bartlett and the rest of the prisoners were released at the time of the surrender of arms was made; however, Bartlett was paroled when our flag of truce went out to meet the flag of the Californians next day after the battle.

"The sickness has abated considerably within the last two weeks with the late emigration. There have been a great many deaths, principally females and children.

"Since I left your hospitable house I have been scarcely out of my saddle. I have been riding all the time, often twenty-four hours, before we would eat anything, and at other times forty hours before we could have an opportunity of sleeping. It has rained on us two days and nights out of three, wet and drenched, like so many rats. We would unsaddle and lie down under a tree, or along a pole fence, or by an old corral.

"The majority of the females of the Californians in the country had left their houses before the fight on the Santa Clara plains. A number of Spaniards from this place and vicinity were engaged in it.

"Dear sir, I am heartily glad that I had such an opportunity to fight for my country. I feel by so doing I have done my duty and no more; but I am still ready to take the field in her cause, knowing that she is always right. I tell you, my friend, many were the dodges I made with my head from the balls that whistled by me, some almost touching my left arm; a gentleman's right and a ball passed through between our hands. We soon gave them an exchange, and I called to me a Delaware Indian who had a rifle that would carry up well; he fired, and I think wounded one of them.

"Every man in the fight acted well his part. The reason that there are so few killed was because we could not get close to them. Their horses were fine, while ours were broken down.

"The following is a copy of his discharge from Captain Weber's company, written by Captain Weber and copied by me from the original, now in possession of his daughter, Mrs. Patty Reed Lewis, at Capitolia:

#### Commends Work of Reed.

##### (Copy.)

"This is to certify that Mr. James F. Reed has been acting as first lieutenant in the mounted rifle company at the Pueblo of St. Joseph, during the time of one month and a half.

"On the present occasion I take great pleasure to state that said Mr. James F. Reed has acted in the capacity of first lieutenant to my entire satisfaction. I acknowledge hereby the important service which he rendered to his country by his knowledge and experience of an old soldier.

"His gallant conduct on the 2d of January on the plains of Santa Clara, on which day he contributed greatly to the victory over the insurgent Californians, merits the highest praises."

"Pueblo of St. Joseph, Jan. 26, 1847.  
"Charles M. Weber,  
"Commanding U. S. Rangers, Pueblo."

He was now released from military duty and permitted to continue his journey to Yerba Buena to get assistance and relief for his starving family and others on the others on the eastern slope of the mountains of the Sierra Nevada.

He had left his Masonic papers and others with his wife and his mark as a Mark Master Mason and member of Springfield Royal Arch Chapter, No. 1, of Springfield, Ill. When she and her little hungry family were on the uttermost point of starvation and without funds, she went to one of the party, Patrick Dolan (who had secured all the beef of their cattle that had been killed) and offered it in exchange for just only one pound of beef to save her starving children, promising that it would be tenfold redeemed by Mr. Reed when they would meet him in California. Dolan demanded not only the mark jewel, but also her gold watch, the gift of her mother, in addition, and that she had to part with to get the pound of beef.

When he had gotten all he could from those in the camp he started over the mountains and perished in a snow-storm by a tree on his way, and when the first relief party from Sutter's Fort brought her and a part of her family over the mountains and she reached Johnson's ranch on Bear river, her watch and her husband's jewel were given to her. They had been brought in by the Indians who found them in the torn rags of Dolan's clothing, while the wolves had gnawed and scattered his bones. The mark was what saved them; the device being a passion cross with twenty-eight stars in two semicircles over it, and representing the number of the states in the union at that time. On the reverse side was engraved his name and the chapter to which Reed belonged.

The most liberal charitable construction that could be placed upon Dolan's action was that Reed would at once redeem them when they met; but his manner at the time that he demanded them to the pound of beef, would not warrant such a conclusion. But they are still intact and in possession of Reed's daughter, Patty, and I have seen and handled them.

#### Assistance at Yerba Buena.

Reed secured assistance from Captain Huil of the United States sloop-of-war Warren and the citizens of Yerba Buena, as well as from Brother George C. Yount of Napa valley and Gen. M. G. Vallejo and others at Sonoma, and, with Lieut. Selim C. Woodworth, U. S. N., with provisions and supplies, started for the relief of the starving and dying at Truckee lake's borders. Pushing on ahead of Woodworth, he reached the rest of his loved ones and the others, and not since the days of Christ on earth has there been exhibited such a noble, forgiving disposition as that of James Frazier Reed.

He found Keesburg, the cannibal (if not the murderer of Mrs. Donner), feeble, emaciated and helpless, covered with sores and vermin and in rags. He bathed him with oil, tenderly washed him from head to foot, cleansing him thoroughly in spite of his protestations and tears, put new clothing upon him and prepared him for his journey to California when he should be able to travel. Said Keesburg:

"Mr. Reed, just to think that I was urging others to help to hang you from the end of my raised wagon tongue, and with them drove you from your family and out from the camp to perish of starvation in the snow!"

### Is Kind to Cannibal.

Said Reed: "Never mind about that now. I want to see you get well and out of this place as soon as possible."

Reed then, with the second relief party, started out from Starvation camp, carrying his little daughter, Patty, on his back—with apparently a dying little girl—an almost hopeless burden, that would have to be buried and covered up by the wayside. Still he bore her tenderly until he placed her in her mother's arms at Sutter's Fort, where all the family were united, and the rest of those relieved and turned over to Sutter as commissary were: William Graves, Edward Brinn, Simon Brinn, Solomon Hook, Mrs. Keesburg, George Donner, Jr., two of George Donner, Sr.'s girls, Eliza Williams and Noah James. In all, thirteen.

When all the emigrants of the Reed-Donner party had arrived at Sutter's Fort and before they should separate, Reed demanded of Sutter and the citizens in and about the fort, a thorough legal investigation of the matter of the death of Snyder on the desert. Squire John Sinclair was justice of the peace for that district. A jury of the citizens was empaneled, and every one of the Reed-Donner party there was duly sworn and gave their testimony under oath. After due and careful deliberation the jury found a unanimous verdict of justifiable homicide in self-defense, and Reed completely exonerated without a stain upon his character and free to go where he pleased. He then soon after removed to George C. Youth's place in Napa Valley, and while there received the following appointment:

### Appointed Sheriff of Sonoma.

(Copy.)

I, Libburn W. Boggs, Alcalde of the district of Sonoma, do hereby depature and appoint J. F. Reed to discharge the duties of sheriff of the district of Sonoma until the governor and commander in chief of this territory shall make a regular appointment.

Given under my hand at office in Sonoma on the 25th day of April, 1847.

Libburn W. Boggs.

This was followed by

(Copy.)

Known all men by these presents: That I, Richard B. Mason, colonel First Regiment Dragoons, United States army, and governor of California, by virtue of authority in me vested, do hereby appoint James F. Reed sheriff of the district of Sonoma on the north side of the bay of San Francisco.

Given at Monterey, the capital of California, the 14th day of June, A. D. 1847, and the 71st of the independence of the United States. R. B. Mason. Colonel First Dragoons and Governor of California.

Directed to L. W. Boggs, Alcalde, Sonoma, Cal.

Care of assistant quartermaster, San Francisco.

Not long after receiving this appointment he removed to San Jose and was subsequently given the big key and took possession of the Mission of San Jose now in Alameda county and became the first exporter of dried fruit to the Hawaiian islands. He invested his money largely in real estate in Santa Clara county, and if the state capital had remained there large blocks of land were ready to be donated for the erection of public buildings. He gave as a free gift to the city of San Jose what is now known as St. James square and the block on which the State Normal school is erected. His other real estate was seized upon by the squatters and he and his family's lives were threatened and they removed to Santa Cruz,

where he was for a while engaged in burning lime. Subsequently he returned to San Jose, where he was in the offices of chief of police and mayor of that city and was constantly engaged in studying and protecting the public interests.

### Becomes Catholic Voluntarily.

His daughter Virginia married J. Murphy, of the famous Murphy family, who bore the order of Moderne Sionist to Capt. John Murphy for General Vallejo's release. She is now a widow and one of women and ladies that ever adorned the soil of California. Impressed with confiding trust and many of her family that they would

(Continued on page 2.)

## GIVES DETAILS OF REED-DONNER TRIP

(Continued from page 1.)

by an overruling providence when at Starvation camp, she became a voluntary convert to the Catholic faith, to which she devoutly adheres, which is her right and undisputed privilege.

The loving and lovable little Patty, brought out on her father's back and saved from death and burial by the wayside, married Frank Lewis, a merchant of San Jose and a member of its city council, but he too passed away. He was a veteran of the Mexican war, who served in Colonel Wright's regiment of Massachusetts volunteers in Mexico, in which Maj. Fletcher Webster, son of Daniel Webster, the statesman, lost his life in the service of his country. Mrs. Patty Reed Lewis, with her family of daughters, Margaret, Mattie, Carrie and Susan, lives at Capitola, while her son, James Frazier Lewis, resides at Santa Cruz, and her son, Frank Reed Lewis, is clerk for the Northern Nevada Railroad company at Reno, Nev., and prospering. Her brother, James, is at San Jose, and her brother, Thomas, lives with her at Capitola.

**Download a FREE audiobook today!**

75,000 audiobooks & more • Works with Apple® iPod®



**audible.com**

[Learn More](#)

**CNN.com**

PRINT THIS

Powered by Clickability

[Click to Print](#)

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

## Researchers: Donner Party member carried Lincoln documents on journey

By the CNN Wire Staff

### STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- Experts say military list includes Abraham Lincoln's handwriting
- The list, from the Black Hawk War, says Lincoln had an \$85 horse and \$15 of equipment
- Historians say an organizing member of the Donner Party carried the documents
- They are part of a collection at the California State Library

(CNN) – Researchers have made an unexpected discovery among the items a member of the Donner Party kept in a carpetbag on the group's ill-fated journey to California: a military document with Abraham Lincoln's handwriting on it.

Donner Party member James Reed and his family carried muster rolls with Lincoln's name on them among their treasured heirlooms, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum said in a statement released Monday.

A team of librarians, historians and handwriting experts combined forces to confirm that Lincoln's writing was on one of the documents, which list Lincoln and volunteer soldiers who fought in the 1832 Black Hawk War.

"We often find documents that detail fascinating stories about Abraham Lincoln's life and times, but it is rare indeed for the document to have such an intriguing history after it was written," said Daniel Stowell, director of the Papers of Abraham Lincoln. "That these documents detail part of Lincoln's military service and that they accompanied the Donner Party to California makes them doubly significant."

All four of the muster rolls include "Private Abraham Lincoln" among the list of soldiers. On one of them, experts say two-and-a-half lines are clearly written in Lincoln's hand. And the documents reveal that Lincoln had a horse worth \$85 and equipment valued at \$15, noting that Lincoln received one tent that was United States property to be returned at the end of his service.

The lines Lincoln wrote said: "Muster Roll of Captain Jacob M. Earleys Company of Mounted Volunteers Mustered out of the service of the United States By order of Brigadier General Atkinson of the United States army on White Water Rivers of Rock River on the 10th day of July 1832."

The documents are part of the James Frazier Reed Collection at the California State Library.

Reed's name appears just beneath Lincoln's on the list. He was one of the organizing members of the Donner Party, the group of pioneers known for resorting to cannibalism while enduring a harsh winter in the Sierra Nevada mountains.

He likely inherited the papers from the military company's commander and took them with him when he left Springfield, Illinois, in April 1846 because they were part of his personal history, the Lincoln Presidential Library said.

While historians believe the papers accompanied the Donner Party for their entire journey, Reed did not. He was banished from the group after fighting with a teamster and stabbing him to death, Monday's library statement said.

He left the papers with his wife after being expelled from the party, and "she brought them safely in her bosom to California when helped by the first relief party which went to their assistance," daughter Martha Jane "Patty" Reed recalled.

**Find this article at:**

<http://www.cnn.com/2010/US/07/20/california.lincoln.document/index.html?hpt=C2>





Digitized by the Internet Archive  
in 2013

<http://archive.org/details/abrahamlincolnscjfrlinc>

